

Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)
REL 2210/ JST 2930 / REL 3938, Fall 2025
MWF 6 (12:50-1:40), FAC 0120

Professor: Dr. Robert Kawashima
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Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the modern scholarly study of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and its world. While we will touch upon various literary genres in the Bible, we will focus on biblical narrative, as we trace the history of ancient Israel — inasmuch as this can be reconstructed from our primary sources — from its origins up to the Babylonian Exile (586 B.C.E.). We will also analyze various aspects of the “culture” of ancient Israel, including its political (judges, kings) and religious (priests, prophets) institutions. In particular, we will study Israelite religion, not just as a set of beliefs and practices, but as a mode of knowledge, a means of understanding god(s), humans, the world, and the relations between them. Topics will include: myth, ritual, sacrifice, law, and the sacred. Here, we will address the conceptual divide between so-called “pagan” religions and, for lack of a better term, the “monotheistic” religion of ancient Israel. The point isn’t to judge the relative merits of these two different religious systems, but to recognize and understand their differences. Our approach will be broadly literary and comparative. Thus, we will draw upon the mythic and epic traditions of Mesopotamia and Ugarit, in order to bring the peculiar nature of the Bible and biblical religion into better focus. And throughout the semester, various methodological questions regarding textual interpretation and the analysis of religion and culture will be raised. **REL 3938 will require a slightly different set of assignments matching a 3000-level course.**

Required Texts:

SBL Study Bible — or other approved translation
Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia*
Additional secondary readings, course materials, and information will be made available through
Canvas – <https://elearning.ufl.edu/>

Recommended Text:

John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 3d edition (2018)

Accommodations for students with disabilities: students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

Course Requirements:

Attendance is mandatory

REL 2210 & JST 2930

Participation — 10%

3 Exams — 90%

REL 3938

Participation — 10%

3 Exams — 67.5%

1 Written Exercise (3 pages) – (22.5%)

Make-up exams must be approved by instructor beforehand, or justified afterward by providing appropriate documentation (medical, etc.).

Grade scale:

	87–89 = B+	77–79 = C+	67–69 = D+	below 60 = E
93–100 = A	83–86 = B	73–76 = C	63–66 = D	
90–92 = A-	80–82 = B-	70–72 = C-	60–62 = D-	

Schedule:

PRIMEVAL HISTORY

Week 1

8/22 **Introduction:** syllabus; general background

Week 2

8/25 **Creation:** Genesis 1-3

8/27 **Cosmogony:** *Epic of Creation* (Dalley)

8/29 **Creation:** Genesis 1-3

Week 3

9/1 **Labor Day (no class)**

9/3 **Philology (on the text and the language of the Bible):** Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, “Introduction” (online)

9/5 **Myth versus History:** *Gilgamesh* (Dalley, pp 95-120); Eliade, “Sacred Time and Myths” (online)

Week 4

9/8 **The Human Condition:** *Atrahasis* (Dalley)

9/10 **The Human Condition:** Genesis 6-9

9/12 **Heroes:** *Gilgamesh* (Dalley)

THE PATRIARCHS

Week 5

9/15 **Discussion:** Genesis 4:1-17; 6:1-4; 11:1-9

9/17 **Patriarchs:** Genesis 12-36; *Aqhat* (online)

9/19 **Patriarchs:** Genesis 12-36; *Aqhat* (online)

FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

Week 6

- 9/22 **Joseph in Egypt:** Genesis 37-50
 9/24 **EXAM 1** (from 8/25 to 9/22)
 9/26 **The Exodus:** Exodus 1-15

Week 7

- 9/29 **The Covenant:** Genesis 12, 15, 17, 28, 35; Exodus 19-24; *Atrahasis*, pp 14-18; *Epic of Creation*, pp 259-64 (Dalley)
 10/1 **Sacred Space:**
 Exodus 35-40; Numbers 1-3, 9:15-23;
 Exodus 33:6-11; Numbers 11:16-17, 12:4-10; Deuteronomy 31:14-15;
 Genesis 28, 35; 2 Samuel 24; 1 Kings 8
 10/3 **Sacred Time:** Exodus 12, 23:10-17, 31:12-17, 34:18-24; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28-29; Deuteronomy 16

Week 8

- 10/6 **Sacrifice and Purity:** Leviticus; Deuteronomy 14:1-21
 10/8 **Discussion:** TBA
 10/10 **In the Wilderness:** Exodus 1-24, 32-34; Numbers 1-3, 11-17, 22-26; Joshua 1-5

THE EMERGENCE OF ISRAEL

Week 9

- 10/13 **The Border:** Deuteronomy 12-26
 10/15 **The Judge:** Judges
 10/17 **Homecoming** (no class)

Week 10

- 10/20 **Reading Day** (no class)
 10/22 **Biblical Poetry:** Exodus 14-15; Judges 4-5; 2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18
 10/24 **And there was no king in Israel...:** Judges

THE UNITED MONARCHY

Week 11

- 10/27 **EXAM 2** (from 9/26 to 10/24)
 10/29 **Samuel:** 1 Samuel; *Hammurabi Law Code* & *The Sumerian King List* (online)
 10/31 **Saul:** 1 Samuel

Week 12

- 11/3 **Discussion:** TBA
 11/5 **David:** 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-2
 11/7 **Solomon:** 1 Kings 3-11

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

Week 13

- 11/10 **The Prophet:** 1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 2; Amos; Hosea; Isaiah 1-6
 11/12 **The Messiah:** 2 Samuel 6-7; 2 Kings 17, 24-25; Psalms 2, 89, 110; Isaiah 9:1-6, 11
 11/14 **The Deuteronomistic Reform:** Deuteronomy 6-7, 29-30; 2 Kings 14-23

THE EXILE

Week 14

11/17 **The Exile:** Leviticus 26; Jeremiah 1-25, 34-45; Ezekiel 4-24; Psalm 137

11/19 **The Rebuilding of Jerusalem:** Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 7-12

11/21 **Reading Day (no class); written exercise due (for REL 3938 ONLY);** email to rsk@ufl.edu

Week 15

11/24-28 **Thanksgiving (no class)**

Week 16

12/1 **The Dawn of Apocalypticism:** Isaiah 26-27, 40-42, 51; Ezekiel 40, 47; Daniel 7-12

12/3 **EXAM 3** (from 10/29 to 12/1)

UF COURSE POLICIES

Attendance:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open.

Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida

community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments: For more information, please see:

<http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog0910/policies/regulationferpa.html>

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

- Learn aspects of the ancient culture that produced the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.
- Learn basic concepts having to do with the study of religion, especially as these are represented in biblical texts.
- Identify and describe the theories and methods used in the discipline of literary criticism and interpretation. What, in particular, are the challenges facing the study of ancient texts produced by foreign cultures in foreign languages.
- Analyze and interpret various ancient religious documents.